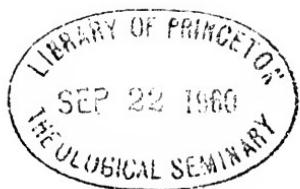


J. Iverach

Inspiration and Criticism

BS480
.I94



BS480
.I94





THEOLOGICAL THOUGHT.

INSPIRATION AND CRITICISM.

By REV. PROF. J. V. IVERACH, D.D.

THE question of Inspiration and its relation to criticism is one beset with difficulties, partly arising from the nature of the case, and partly from the anxiety and fear which fill the minds of many people when the subject is raised in any form. The anxiety is natural, and in no way to be blamed. It is right that men should be anxious and troubled when a discussion is raised which seems to involve the very highest interests, and to bring into peril what they believe to be the foundations on which their faith and hope are built. The Scriptures have found them ; the Scriptures have been a source of guidance, of comfort, of strength ; they have been an adequate rule of faith and manners ; they have spoken with a voice of authority ; and it is not to be wondered at that men have been jealous and suspicious of any tendency which might even seem to lessen the authority or diminish the worth of Holy Scripture. Such an anxiety is deserving of the highest respect.

There is also another thing which makes discussion difficult. It arises partly from the feeling we have described, and partly from theoretical considerations. Men seem to have unconsciously set to themselves a problem of this sort. The Bible is a book which has certain uses for the individual and for the Church. It is a book which speaks with authority ; it is the guide of life, the source of consolation, and it has many other uses which need not be enumerated at present. Theology has often proceeded as if it had set itself to answer the question, What must be the marks, notes, characteristics of a book which shall secure these ends and fulfil these purposes ? And often the question has been answered ideally and theoretically by a deductive method, not inductively. A book which professes to be a revelation from God must have such and such qualities ; a book which is to be an adequate guide to man in all the concerns of his religious and moral life must be so and so. Theology has often proceeded on this method, and the opponents of religion—especially those who deny revelation altogether—have been glad to accept the issue on these terms, or they have added criteria of their own as to what qualities a supposed revelation must have. Bishop Butler deals with this matter in his own wise, cautious, and masterly way in the second part of his *Analogy*. He enumerates some of the notions current in his time, among those who attacked and among those who defended Christianity, as to what revelation ought to be. “ There are those who think it a strong objection against the authority of Scripture, that it is not composed by rules of art, agreed upon by critics, for polite and correct writing. And the scorn is inexpressible with which some of the prophetic parts of Scripture are treated ; partly through the rashness of interpreters, but very much also on

account of the hieroglyphical and figurative language in which they are left us." Other supposed criteria of revelation laid down by the opponents of Christianity were, that a revelation from God must be universal, not confined to one people; that it must not contain matters of offence, "which have led, and, it must have been foreseen, would lead into strange enthusiasm and superstition, and be made to serve the purposes of tyranny and wickedness"; that its meaning must be clear, and the interpretation of its meaning easy; and that its evidence must be convincing and satisfactory. The Bishop's answer generally is, "that upon supposition of a revelation, it is highly credible beforehand, we should be incompetent judges of it to a great degree: and that it would contain many things appearing to us liable to great objections, in case we judge of it otherwise than of the analogy of nature." See the argument as unfolded in the third chapter of the second part of the *Analogy*.

Now, it is obvious that the defenders of revelation and of the truth of Christianity are put to a great disadvantage if they must argue on this basis. Allow the one side or the other to lay down criteria of revelation, or to state categorically what are the notes and marks of a real revelation, and immediately the issue is changed. Inevitably we shall find ourselves discussing the question, Are these marks of revelation to be found in the Scriptures? Is the meaning of the Scriptures clear and consistent? Is their literary form of that pure and perfect type which, it is agreed, a Divine revelation ought to have? Is every statement infallibly true, not merely with respect to its substance, but in respect to its form? Is the text without flaw; its grammar perfect; its science correct? If the defenders of revelation are allowed to lay down criteria of revelation, clearly the same right cannot be denied to its opponents; and the controversy becomes one about the possible criteria of a possible revelation, and it would inevitably result in withdrawing attention from the actual revelation we have, and from its claims to the allegiance of men. No satisfactory conclusion can be reached by a discussion of an issue of this kind.

The history of science affords us many instances of the manner in which progress was stopped, ignorance perpetuated, and a knowledge of the actual facts and laws of nature delayed by assumptions of the same kind as have been made with regard to Scripture. Science made but little progress until it forsook its habit of affirming what must be, and humbly set itself to inquire into what really is. Then men found that they were living in a rational world, a world whose methods, laws, facts presented an order grander far than they had ever dreamed of. Astronomers no longer said that the heavenly bodies moved in circles, because their motion must be perfect, and the circle is the most perfect curve. The habit of ascribing perfection to nature was forgotten, and yet men came to see that the thought, reason, plan which are manifested by nature in every part were something grander, more perfect, more full of varied and harmonious order than were the limited ideas of perfection to which, in their ignorance, they would have subjected

her. Science is also full of illustrations of the truth of what Leslie says—“In the course of investigations I have found myself compelled to relinquish some preconceived notions, but I have not abandoned them hastily, nor, till after a warm and obstinate defence, I was driven from every post.” (Quoted by Stanley Jevons in *The Principles of Science*, vol. ii., p. 234.)

Many a student of the Bible must say the same thing. Our preconceived notions are very precious to us. We are unwilling to part with them, and as a matter of fact we do not part with them until we are driven from every post. A history of the doctrine of Inspiration for the last two hundred years would lead us to some rather startling conclusions. It would surprise some to find out how much is thought consistent with the doctrine of Inspiration now, which was regarded as utterly inconsistent with it at some former time, and that, too, by theologians as able, as honest, as competent as any living at this hour. In truth, the only safe principle for us to lay down in this question is, that Inspiration is consistent with all the phenomena of Scripture. It is not for us to lay down in any absolute manner what is and what is not consistent with Inspiration. We must set aside preconceived notions, and, instead of laying down conditions, content ourselves with learning humbly what the Scriptures have to teach us.

Inspiration, then, is consistent with a measure of uncertainty as to what the text of Scripture really is. It is a commonplace to say that the true text lies beyond our reach. Men may say, and say with truth, that the active critical text we now have is indefinitely near to the text of Scripture as originally given; that the various readings are in themselves without much importance, and do not affect the meaning of Scripture; that we have a larger apparatus for determining the text of Scripture than we have for the text of any other book; and many other observations of the same sort may be made without any attempt on our part to gainsay or deny them. It is true that these readings are comparatively unimportant. But it is also true that while they remain, and while we cannot profess to be able to eliminate all uncertainty, we cannot be said to have a text without error and infallibly true. Students of the history of theology will remember how great was the alarm, and how profound the anxiety of many when it was proved that there were numerous various readings, and that it was scarcely possible to decide between them. We have now got accustomed to this state of things, and have come to see that it does not in the least interfere with any use of Scripture needed by the individual or the Church. While we may rejoice in the progress of textual criticism, and be glad that the principles of that science have been elaborated so as in large measure to command assent, yet those who read Westcott and Hort's Introduction on the one hand, and Dean Burgon on the other, can at once see that there are many essential points not yet agreed on. Great are the names and manifold have been the labours of those who have laid the foundations and built up the science of textual criticism, yet even here a great deal remains to be done. Professor Harris, in his learned and exact study of the Codex Bezae, has opened up

a new series of investigations which may go far to modify results widely accepted, and may help us to obtain a purer text.

It does not help us to try to shelve this aspect of the question of Inspiration by speaking of the Scripture "as originally given." For that is an ideal document far beyond our reach, and of its merits and qualities we cannot make any affirmation whatsoever. What must concern us is the Scripture we actually have, and on which we depend for life and guidance, for hope and consolation, for salvation and redemption. We are concerned with these actual Scriptures by the use of which we are made wise unto salvation, and they must have, in their present form, the property and the quality of enabling us to know the mind of Christ and the will of God for our salvation. As a matter of fact, the Scriptures do fulfil the purpose of their being even in the present state of the text. They are profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, and instruction in righteousness, and they produce all the effects on the lives of men, on heart and mind and conscience, which are promised in the Scriptures themselves.

From another point of view, the uncertainty of the text, the number and the history of the various readings, and the process by which they have become what they are, have a positive advantage. They are one means by which we are able to trace the documents of the New Testament back, and to vindicate for them an early date. We are learning to use the history of text variations for apologetic purposes, and by-and-bye we shall be able to give a triumphant answer to those who would make all our New Testament books to be documents of the second century. There are indications not a few which point in this direction; but it would be irrelevant to introduce them here. My aim is to show that it is scarcely possible for us to make the affirmations about the infallibility of Scripture which are made until we have got a perfect text, and that we are never likely to have.

The foregoing remarks refer mainly to the New Testament. Scholars often wish that there was the same margin of uncertainty, and a like inner circle of certainty, with regard to the text of the Old Testament. But the truth is that we have no means of obtaining an Old Testament text as near to probable truth as the text of the New Testament is. In many passages the text seems to be corrupt, and every one knows how widely the Hebrew text differs from the Septuagint. Time was when it was earnestly contended that the vowel points was part of the Hebrew text, but no one thinks now of making that assertion. Still, it was made, and alarming consequences were predicted if the contrary was affirmed, and yet it was proven that the introduction of the vowel points was comparatively late, and no serious consequences have followed. But many able and pious people were anxious and alarmed, and thought that the doctrine of Inspiration was seriously endangered.

Another obvious reflection is that the doctrine of Inspiration is consistent with a measure of uncertainty with regard to the interpretation of the text of Scripture. For Scripture is variously interpreted. Precon-

ceptions, presuppositions of all kinds are brought to the Scriptures, and the result is the various schemes of doctrine, each of which is professedly based on the Scriptures. Even when men go to the Scriptures to ascertain what they really mean, and resolutely strive to take nothing with them to the Scriptures, and to learn only what they teach, it is no easy task they undertake. Every exegete knows how hard it is to get face to face with the Scriptures. The greater our reverence for the Scriptures, and the more we desire to understand them in their pure simplicity, the harder we feel our task to be. A misinterpretation is a grave and serious offence against truth, and against Him whose word the Scriptures is. When we have used every endeavour, taken every precaution, there is still a margin of uncertainty, as every scholar knows. So much is needed in order to understand the Scriptures. We need to know something of the conditions of life and thought of the period of their production, something also of the stage of growth or decay of the language in which they were written; what words really meant at that particular time, or what new meaning New Testament writers poured into old words; something also of the mind, the character, the habit of the particular writer whose works we study, we must learn. Ignorance or a mistake in *any* of these matters, and in *any* of the other conditions of interpretation which I have not mentioned, will leave us with a margin of uncertainty as to the real meaning of Scripture; and this margin of uncertainty ought to make us modest when we seek to formulate our doctrine of Inspiration, or to set forth what is implied in it. The history of interpretation is very suggestive. It needs no wide learning to know that there have been periods when the Allegorical method widely prevailed, when the plain historical meaning of Scripture was buried under a load of so-called spiritual lessons: scarcely any fact of Scripture was allowed to be left in its historical simplicity; vast systems of doctrine were based on numbers supposed to have a spiritual meaning; and generally what was professedly brought out of Scripture was first read into it. It is only by slow degrees that interpretation has become historical, exegetical, scientific. Nor are we far removed from the time when men used the Scriptures as a book from which some intimation of the future might be obtained by the simple process of opening its pages at random, and taking the first sentence which met the eye as an intimation of the Divine Will. No one will now affirm that this is a legitimate use of Scripture. Yet, as is pointed out by Professor Harris, there are sentences on the margin of "the S. Germain Codex of the Latin Bible known to the New Testament students by the sign g¹," which shows that "the book has been used for purposes of divination, a custom which seems to have widely prevailed in early times, both in civil and ecclesiastical matters" (*A Study of Codex Bezae*, chap. ii.). Practices of this kind, whether in ancient or modern times, reveal a desire on the part of those who used them to attain to greater certainty than the nature of the case admitted. Such a desire may have a larger influence than we know in shaping other conclusions both of a practical and of a theoretic kind.

A due regard to historical and scientific exegesis reveal other phenomena of Scripture which must be consistent with the doctrine of Inspiration. We are familiar now with the science of Biblical theology. At this hour it is surely not necessary to defend either the method of study or the results which have been ascertained in the sphere of Biblical theology. But it is comparatively a new science, and, though new, one of the most fruitful in theology. We have come to know that within the vast organism of the Scriptures, as a whole, there are many smaller organisms, relatively independent, and yet conspiring to form the great harmony of the united system of the Word of God. How rich is the diversity of types of doctrine and points of view within the New Testament; and how much richer our theology has become since we have been able in some measure to do justice to the special features of each presentation of the truth; and to recognize, as in a measure we are able to do, how necessary this variety is, in order that we may have some conception of the vastness, manifoldness, and harmonious unity of the truth as it is in Jesus. This new achievement of theology reminds us of the similar situation with regard to the sciences which deal with the outward world. Each science has dealt with its own subject, according to its own method; and when the work of each was so far done, it was found that the inter-relations between them kept pace with the individual progress, until men were able to see that there was a circle or organism of the sciences. Notwithstanding the diversity of one from another, they were found to unite in a higher harmony; and some principles—such as the Conservation of Energy—were really dominant, and all the sciences together were subject to them.

A similar result unfolds itself to the student of the New Testament as he follows his scientific guides through its various books. Each of the Gospels has its own point of view, its own guiding principle, its own leading thought. So much has been won, and may be said to be universally acknowledged. We get from Matthew one way of setting forth Jesus Christ, His person, His work, His place, power, and purpose. What it is we do not at present determine. But we may take for granted that the results of Biblical theology are so far sure as to enable us to say that the aims of the Gospels are diverse. One view from Matthew, another from Mark, another from Luke, and still another from John. There was a time when this rich diversity of system was lost sight of, and was almost obliterated by attempts at a harmony of the Gospels. Biblical science is wiser now, and it strains itself in the effort to set forth the contents of each Gospel in its own distinctive attainment. When this has been done in an adequate manner, then we shall see how they all fall together, and have their place in the grand harmonious truth which concerns the mission, and the peace, and the power, and the person of the Son of God who loved us and gave Himself for us.

What is true of the Gospels is true also of the other books of the New Testament. We are beginning to appreciate the vast variety which is contained in the Epistles of Paul. We find that there is a growing fulness

of revealed truth in his Epistles. From his first extant Epistle—to the Thessalonians—or through them all until we come to the Epistles to the Ephesians and Colossians, we see that the inspired Apostle is led on from truth to truth until he is able to attain to and to set forth the glory of his Master. Christ is placed not only in relation to sinners of the human race, but Christ is shown to be “the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation. For in Him were all things created, in the heavens and upon the earth, things visible and things invisible, whether thrones or dominions, or principalities or powers; all things have been created through Him and unto Him, and He is before all things, and in Him all things consist.” The Apostle was a man that grew in the knowledge of Christ. Under the pressure of many perplexing questions, troubled with many problems raised day by day by some of the many Churches, the charge of which lay on him, meditating much, and thinking deeply, the Apostle is led by the Spirit of God to these statements of the doctrine of the Person of Christ which formed the solution of all the problems which needed to be settled.

We find many other phenomena in the Epistles of Paul. Not to speak of language, style, dialectic reasoning, and other things of that sort, we find that as we pass from group to group of his Epistles, arranging them as far as possible in groups near to each other as regards the time of their having been written, that each group has its own characteristic expressions, its leading conceptions, and its peculiar modes of thought and feeling; and all these varied results are under Inspiration. Thus Inspiration is consistent not only with the characteristics, emotional, intellectual, volitional, of any man, as distinct from another, but is consistent with marked changes in the man himself. It is consistent with the fire, impetuosity, and elasticity of youth; it is also consistent with the wide and wary outlook of ripe experience, and with the calm disciplined power which is the outcome of life-long devotion and loyalty to truth and duty. Such conclusions necessarily follow from a study of the life and writings of Paul.

This follows also from a study of the other writings of the New Testament in their individual peculiarity. How singular in many respects is the Epistle of James! What originality in the Epistle to the Hebrews! When we study it under the guidance of such a man as Riehm, or Westcott, or Bruce, and follow the evolution of thought through all its ramifications, what a difference do we find between its point of view and the point of view of any other book of the New Testament. Why insist on these things? They are notorious to every student of the Bible. Well, our reason is to show what service historical criticism and scientific exegesis has done for the better understanding of the New Testament. Another aim we have in view is to show that the doctrine of Inspiration must be stated in such a way as to be consistent with all the facts we know. For in all our dealings with the Scriptures, science has its rights, which can neither be gainsaid nor ignored. The laws of grammar have their place in the interpretation of an inspired document. For if an inspired book is to be understood, it must use

intelligible language, and must submit itself to the ordinary laws of human speech. This need scarcely be stated. Thus we have our grammars of the New Testament, our lexicons, our references to classical usage, our investigations into the origin, character, and history of that form of Greek in which most of the New Testament books are written. It is of importance too that we should learn how far the writers of the New Testament have departed from classical usage, how far they have introduced new words, how far they are influenced by Hebrew idiom, because without some knowledge of this it is hopeless to attain a true interpretation. Nor are we to be unmindful of the peculiarities of the individual writer, nor of the conditions of thought and life of the time in which he lived.

So far we have spoken of the New Testament, for, with respect to it, the question of interpretation is comparatively simple. All the books contained in it are the product of one century, and are produced under similar historical conditions. They were all in existence within less than a hundred years after the Ascension of our Lord. But with regard to the Old Testament, we have a far more complex problem. Here we have a literature which ranges over a thousand years, produced under all conditions of human society. It has almost all the forms which literature assumes. It has ancient songs, like the Song of Deborah, and the fragment preserved from the book of the Wars of Jehovah. It has catalogues of names, like those in the books of Chronicles; moral laws, like the Decalogue; laws which regulate rites and ceremonies, such as we have in the Levitical legislation; beautiful stories, like that of Joseph; forms of impassioned poetic speech in the Psalms and the Prophets. It is addressed to a people at almost every stage of civilization, and it traces the history of that people, and describes their character and conduct, in the plainest possible terms. Laws are given to them which are described by the highest possible authority as given to them for the hardness of their hearts; customs and ways of living are permitted, or not forbidden, which are absolutely prohibited in the New Testament. There are many other things which strike us in our reading of the literature of the Old Testament.

One obvious thing is the marvellous unity which runs through all the diversity of the books. The books are different in form, different in style, different in subject and matter, and yet there is one tone and spirit in them all. There is growth in them, there is a gradual unfolding in them of the great thoughts which come to perfect expression in the New Testament. In reading them, any one of them, we never can get away from the presence of the living God, nor can we read them without a deepening sense of human sin and unworthiness. From first to last, amid all the perplexing questions that arise, this sense of the Divine Presence in the Book is never absent, a sense which grows ever more keen and vivid as that Presence discloses itself more and more.

But the study of the Old Testament raises many questions. These are not questions which have been raised in a wilful and arbitrary manner, nor

by men who wish to discredit the teaching and destroy the authority of the Old Testament. No doubt, much of what is known as the Higher Criticism has been the work of men who do not believe in a God Who has cared for man, Who has spoken unto man, and can save man from his sins. It is unquestionably true that criticism has often been used by such men as a means for the destruction of belief in the supernatural, and for the rejection of everything which cannot be expressed in terms of the natural. The way to deal with such criticism is not to deny whatsoever facts of Scripture have been brought to light by their investigations, but to bring to the surface their underlying assumptions and to deal with these on their merits. The criticism of the New Testament, carried on with such vigour and acuteness by the Tübingen School, has resulted in a surer knowledge and a firmer grasp of the historic truth of the New Testament. While the assumptions of the school have been discredited, yet to that vigorous and prolonged controversy we owe a large increase of knowledge and a surer grasp of principles. Such is the state of the matter also with regard to criticism of the Old Testament. A criticism of the Old Testament is possible which shall not proceed on the assumptions of Kuenen and Wellhausen. When criticism is reverent, when it does not assume that the supernatural is unhistorical, when it does not ignore the possibility that God can reveal Himself to man, and when it proceeds on the usual principles of historical investigation, it does not appear why Christian men should object to it. At all events, it is with us, and it does not appear likely to depart. What it is we may readily see, for we can watch its processes and its results as these appear in the hands of believing men. How very different the spirit and method of criticism are in the hands of Dr. Driver and of Wellhausen, while in many instances the results of their criticism are identical.

My purpose here is not to inquire into the methods of the Higher Criticism, nor to enter into the merits of the controversy which is still going on. Agreement has not by any means been attained as yet. There are competent men like Professor Green and Principal Cave who still contend for the Mosaic authorship of the Pentateuch. There are other men who believe that the Pentateuch had not attained its present form until after the Captivity. We are not to attempt to decide on so great an issue and between combatants of such vigour and prowess. When we look back on the history of the Higher Criticism, and observe the points on which something like unanimity of opinion has been obtained; when we observe the increasing number of believing men—men who believe the Old Testament to be a revelation from God—who believe also in Criticism, it is obvious that it is not possible for us to act as if the Higher Criticism were not in existence. It is obvious, too, that the Higher Criticism has proceeded on a legitimate method, and has had regard to facts and phenomena which are in the Scriptures themselves. It has proceeded in the way described by Bishop Butler, "by particular persons attending to, comparing and pursuing intimations scattered up and down

the Scriptures, which are overlooked and disregarded by the generality of the world." There are things in the Old Testament Scriptures which press for comparison with one another, and when these are compared they lead to certain conclusions. There is the fact that there are different names for God in different sections of the Book of Genesis. How can the fact be explained? When men set themselves to follow out the hint contained in this fact, it leads them on step by step until the conclusion is reached that there are different documents in the Pentateuch. Each of these supposed documents have notes and marks peculiar to itself which distinguishes it broadly from all the others. There is a wonderful agreement among critics as to the characteristics of these documents, as to their extent, and as to their limits; that there are the Deuteronomic document, the prophetical narrative of the Hexateuch—for the Book of Joshua belongs to the first five books of Scripture, and must be considered along with it—and the priestly narrative of the Hexateuch. Critics, as has just been said, are agreed as to these documents, and it is not likely that their verdict will be reversed. They are not in agreement as to the date of these, nor as to the relation which the prophetical has to the priestly narrative, though there are signs that here, too, there is a growing approximation to agreement. It may be remarked in passing that there are great difficulties with regard to the view which make the books descriptive of ritual latest; for, as Professor Saussaye says, "The materials connected with ritual are the most original among the elements of religious life, are more permanent. Ritual customs last for centuries, are differently combined and joined with other ideas, cease to be officially ritual and become popular, but remain, for all that, the most stable elements of religion, carrying us back to the most distant time" (*Manual of Science of Religion*, p. 68). Thus criticism of the Old Testament seems to lead to a position unlike that which obtains in other religions. There are other difficulties also, but we are not to argue the question.

For we are brought face to face with certain facts and arguments as to the structure of the Old Testament. There is the fact of the documents of which Principal Rainy has said, "I do not think that the evidence can be resisted in favour of the use and incorporation in the Book of Genesis of independent documents, distinguished, among other peculiarities, by the names they apply to the Divine Being. . . . I believe it to be quite true, and capable of proof, that distinct and distinguishable documents look out upon us from large portions of the text of Genesis" (*The Bible and Criticism*, p. 125). But the evidence for distinct documents is as clear for the whole Hexateuch as for the Book of Genesis. If the documentary hypotheses are once admitted, we cannot say at once how far it may carry us. But this must be said, that the question is one to be determined by evidence, and cannot be foreclosed by any predilection of ours. What we have to ask is, Is there anything in the Higher Criticism as it is wrought out by believing men inconsistent with the Inspiration and authority of Holy Scripture? Is it

less consistent with Inspiration than the other phenomena of Scripture already enumerated? It were somewhat hazardous to affirm this. One thing is evident, that there are men who are both critics and believers in the authority of Scripture. Dr. Driver, for instance, says, "Criticism in the hands of Christian scholars does not banish or destroy the Inspiration of the Old Testament; it *presupposes* it; it seeks only to determine the conditions under which it operates, and the literary forms through which it manifests itself; and thus it helps us to frame truer conceptions of the methods which it has pleased God to employ in revealing Himself to His ancient people of Israel, and in preparing the way for the fuller manifestation of Himself in Christ Jesus" (Driver's Introduction, preface p. xix.). One might refer also to the venerable name of Delitzsch, "clarum et venerabile nomen," whose praise is in all the Churches, and whose services have been so conspicuous. His changing attitude to this class of questions, as it may be traced through the successive editings of the *Commentary on Genesis*, is most instructive, and perhaps may be typical. Every reader of his *New Commentary on Genesis* knows how large were the concessions he made, and how many of the conclusions of criticism he accepted. Not one of these would he have made had he thought them inconsistent with the Inspiration of the Old Testament. The Divine authority of the Old Testament was a fundamental belief of his, not to be hazarded or surrendered on any terms. If men of the type of Driver and Delitzsch, so competent in every way, so Christian, have been able to reconcile criticism and faith, is there not a presumption that a reconciliation is possible?

Suppose the results, or some of them, true—what is our attitude to be? Are we to declare them inconsistent with Inspiration, as perhaps is the first impulse of some of us? Or are we to say that as we have found Inspiration to be quite consistent with many phenomena, which in former times seemed to be quite inconsistent with it, so we shall find in the present instance? We may have thought, as the conclusions of the Higher Criticism forced themselves on our view, accompanied as they were with a hostile attitude to all that is precious to a Christian man, that such results were quite incompatible with any doctrine of Inspiration. But a calmer reflection followed, and a closer examination of the facts; and it was seen that many things pointed out by the critics were indisputable facts of Scripture. What happened then was this, that we had to widen our conceptions of the phenomena of Scripture; that the great boon of Holy Scripture had not come to man in the simple way we had supposed; that the process of the delivery and preservation of the oracles of God was much more complex, and involved a much more lengthened process than we had conceived; but is there anything in the discovery of this fact--supposing it to be a fact—which should interfere with the authority of Scripture? Inspiration is consistent with all the phenomena of Scripture, and is consistent with all that the Higher Criticism can find to be true phenomena of Scripture. For my own part, I have not been able to accept all the results, either of Dr.

Driver or of Delitzsch, and on the whole question a great deal of work remains to be done. But surely there is a *modus vivendi* possible which shall leave men like them time to work out the whole subject, without being suspected, or unduly interfered with.

Accepting, for the sake of argument, the result of the Higher Criticism as set forth by Dr. Driver, in what position do we find ourselves? Are we constrained to surrender that view of Scripture which looks at the Scriptures as the Word of God and the only adequate rule of life? Far from it. When we have exhausted all that the Higher Criticism has had to say as to the conditions under which the Old Testament Scriptures were given to men, and the literary forms in which they are presented, we have untouched the moral and spiritual qualities of the Old Testament itself. We have its view of God, of man, and of the world, and the influence which these exert on the heart and conscience of mankind. From our increasing knowledge of the religions of the world, and of the forms which these have assumed in the course of time, we are enabled to see that in the religion of Israel we are in the presence of a phenomena which is without parallel in ancient literature. Let us grant that the Hexateuch had not reached its final form until after the Exile, yet even then we are in the presence of phenomena which demand an adequate historical explanation. Five centuries before the beginning of our era, Israel was in possession of truths about God which no other people were in possession of at that time; truths which the most thoughtful and cultured peoples of the world have found adequate to the expression of their highest thought and of their deepest religious feeling. Israel had reached that Ethical Monotheism, that conception of the unity and omnipotence of God, of His creative power, of His providential government, of His ethical character, His holiness, justice, goodness, and truth, which has obtained such wonderful expression in the second part of the Book of Isaiah. The attempt to apply that law of progress which some students of the history of religions have thought they have found in other religions, has failed in the case of Israel. From Animism and Fetishism, through Polytheism to Theism, is the line of advance. We do not speak at present of the difficulties which almost all religions place in the way of the acceptance of this law as an adequate statement of the case. But, at all events, it has failed in the case of Israel. There is an entire absence of those intermediate steps by which the transition is supposed to be made from Animism to Theism. Many of the causes which are supposed to lead to Theism—such as political unity, increased geographical knowledge, a growing sense of the unity of things, increased scientific knowledge, increased powers of generalized statement, or a universal conception of the reign of law—have no place in the history of Israel. But Israel had somehow attained to the knowledge of God, and of His relation to man and to the world. There is a great difference too, we might say the greatest possible contrast, between the kind of Theism reached by Israel and that reached by any other people in the history of the world. Plato could reach the abstract idea of Being, and

describe it as the centre and source of all that is. Aristotle could reach self-thinking thought, busied with itself, and removed from all else, incapable or unwilling to come into contact with an actual world of men or things; and Cicero, generalizing from the features of Roman law, could think of gods and men as a community living in relations defined by law. But these are the highest efforts of the human mind outside of Israel. Here, then, is a people with no wide dominion to raise them to wider views of the unity of things, with no power of abstract thought to lead them to the abstract idea of existence, with no wide grasp of the thought of law to lead them to the conception of an ordered cosmos, who yet rose to a higher view than Greek or Roman ever had. They came to think of a God who in the beginning made the heavens and the earth, of a God not remote nor removed from the world, but who indeed did dwell with men on the earth, of a God of holiness, truth, and love, and they spoke of Him as the living God. How came Israel to rise to so great a height? The answer is obvious. God had revealed Himself to Israel, had dealt with them as He had dealt with no other nation, and has recorded the story of His dealings with them in such a way as to make the record live and move and breathe to this hour with the mighty energy of His continual presence. Even when we grant the results, or all the legitimate results of the critical movement, give to criticism all the rights it can claim, we have still all the mighty resources of arguments of the kind we have outlined, wherewith to vindicate the Divine authority and inspiration of the Scriptures, and their claim to be the Word of God and to be the guide and inspirer of men. But this is an argument which can scarcely be used by men who tie us to the formal discussion of a theme which limits itself to the question: Are there or are there not errors in the Scriptures?

Another consideration which ought to give us some equanimity in the present crisis is the fact that the Bible does not come to us as an untried book, or one whose merits, worth, and claims have, for the first time, to be sifted. The Bible comes to us to-day with the testimonies of many generations of men as to its Divine truth, and as to its power to guide and save men. It has been the means of making bad men good, of implanting unselfish motives in the hearts of selfish men; it has been productive of a kind of life which, in the opinion of all people, is the highest kind of life which the world has ever seen. It has, in many respects, made the world new; it has emancipated the slave, has purified personal and family life, has entered into the social, national, and international life of the world; has made itself to belong to the literature of every nation, and, more than any purely national literature, has become the literature of every people.

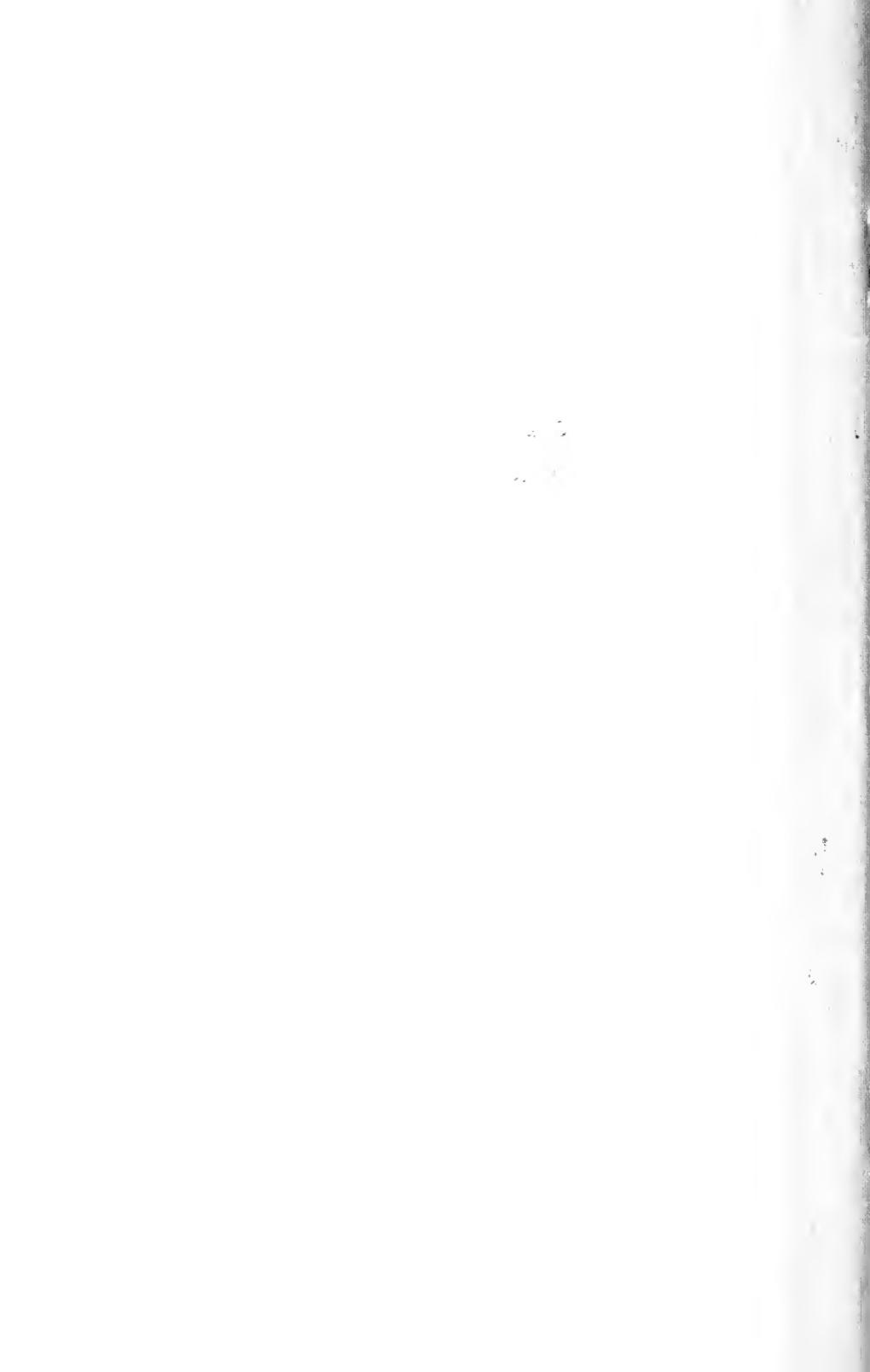
While the Bible has thus incorporated itself with the life and literature of the human race, there are many things in it which are at the present moment unappropriated even by the highest Christian nation. The kind of life it embodies and commands, and presents in concrete form, stands out before us as an ideal not yet attained by any man or nation. The worth and excellence of that life is not denied by any one. If the life contained in

the Scriptures could be attained by a man or a nation, how speedily would the woes and miseries of life disappear. Universal brotherhood, unselfish work, love to all—these are the facts and precepts of Scripture, and they are also the ideal of philosophers; and it is surprising how the outcome of all social philosophies tends to approach to the ideal of personal, family, political, and social life contained in the Scriptures.

Need we be anxious about a book which comes to us accredited in so many weighty ways? Need we be disturbed when a book of such a character, with such a history, with such claims, has attracted to itself the attention of all kinds of men? It has challenged their notice, provoked the hostility of some, and quickened others to enthusiasm, and throughout the centuries it has stood, and still stands, as the witness of God to man, and as God's message of salvation to sinners. When we have so many claims to make on behalf of the Word of God, claims which can neither be weakened nor denied, why should we put in the forefront of the battle a claim to errorless perfection, which can only be made good at the cost of endless argumentation, often of the kind which is only special pleading at the best?

The Scriptures give us certainty as to the matters which it most concerns us to know. When we read the history of the past, when we study the methods of interpretation, and note how limited were the scientific resources of the exegete, and how inadequate his methods, we are amazed to find how often the scientific exegesis of the present has confirmed the conclusions to which, in earlier days, the evangelical consciousness had come. But when we reflect that the interpretation of Scripture depends on two factors, our wonder becomes less. One factor is scientific exegesis, in the widest sense of the term, but the other is the witness of the Holy Spirit. It has often happened that, under the "testimonium Spiritus Sancti," men were led to the knowledge of saving truth, and to loyal acceptance and obedience to it, when the scientific element was very defective. It has also happened that science has failed to reach the mark, and has wofully failed to reach the highest spiritual truth. It is also the case that we have both factors conspiring to the one great end, and then we reach, and can expect only thus to reach, the highest spiritual end—that knowledge of God in Christ which is life eterna.. But both for the giving of Scripture and the receiving of Scripture we need the living action of the living Spirit of God. The mode of action and the aim of the Spirit has a larger scope in the one case than in the other, but in bot^a it is the essential element. Without the action of the Spirit of God moving men, we could have had no Word of God; and without the action of the Spir^b, we can have no adequate apprehension of the Word of God. But what e^c the notes, marks, qualities of the Word of God is a question we^d determine only on an examination of the evidence proper and pertine^e to the subject.

I
-
L
{
A
II
'L'
'L'
J



DATE DUE

BS480 .I94
Inspiration and criticism.

Princeton Theological Seminary-Speer Library



1 1012 00052 0868